



Collection 20: French Spiritual Life

Religious renewal in early modern France

Revisit the prodigious holdings of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* to present an array of texts centered around French spiritual life. Over 900 items featuring more than 370,000 pages of content have been selected from six different BnF departments, with the majority sourced from the renowned *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*. These items – mainly printed in France – reflect both the long history of Christian writings as a whole and the distinctive character of French religious institutions, practices and sensibility. Ranging from early incunabula publications to those of the late 17th century, the collection also serves as a register of Western Christendom's shifting foundations during the turbulent period of Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation, which in France culminated in the fratricidal Wars of Religion and the Huguenot diaspora.

It's widely recognised that one response to the Protestant Reformation was a turn towards a renewed spirituality and asceticism. A late medieval guide to the spiritual life that enjoyed great popularity into the era of print was the *Imitatio* of Thomas à Kempis, although its authorship was at the time often disputed. Some attributed the work to the French scholar Jean Gerson, and Collection 20 features an incunable edition which presents the *Imitatio* alongside Gerson's *De meditatione cordis* as if both works were his own. While such devotional books were now being embraced and contemplated more widely by everyday laity, the Catholic Counter-Reformation also witnessed the revival and reform of religious orders like the Franciscans, as well as the marked growth of women's orders. Collection 20 reflects these developments both through a series of items relating to these orders and in texts by or about female religious figures. Among them is a 1500 Nuremberg edition of the *Revelationes* of Bridget of Sweden, as well as

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Source Library: French materials from the BnF

Approx. 400,000 pages, 1000 works

Launch: June 2022



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